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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of the court-mandated busing plan in Jefferson County (Kentucky) is to promote racially integrated schools and classrooms. The numerous protests since 1975 in Louisville over court-mandated busing are evidence of a low level of intercultural understanding and tolerance. This paper seeks to probe a source of the misunderstanding and intolerance by examining the way white students and minority students who have been brought together through court-ordered busing perceive racial tension and harmony. A sample of 464 white and minority busing-integrated middle and high school students were interviewed. The analysis of their responses revealed that white students perceive somewhat more tension in their integrated classrooms than do minority students, yet minority students are willing to accept less racial harmony than are the white students. A suggestion advanced is that more research be conducted into the attitudinal dispositions of white and minority students in integrated schools so as to more fully understand the sources of racial tension. (Author)

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Ethnic Identification and Perception of Racial Harmony

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Abstract

The primary objective of the court-mandated busing plan in Jefferson County (Kentucky) is to promote racially integrated schools and classrooms. The numerous protests since 1975 in Louisville over court-mandated busing are evidence of a low level of intercultural understanding and tolerance. This paper seeks to probe a source of the misunderstanding and intolerance by examining the way white students and minority students who have been brought together through court-ordered busing perceive racial tension and harmony. A sample of 464 white and minority busing-integrated middle and high school students were interviewed. The analysis of their responses revealed that white students perceive somewhat more tension in their integrated classrooms than do minority students, yet minority students are willing to accept as the way society ought to be less racial harmony than are the white students. A suggestion advanced is that more research be conducted into the attitudinal dispositions of white and minority students in integrated schools so as to more fully understand the sources of racial tension.

Introduction

The primary objective of the Jefferson County Public Schools busing plan is to promote racially integrated schools and classrooms. Busing to achieve racial integration in Jefferson County was mandated by the federal courts, and the plan went into effect at the start of the 1975-76 school year. As a result of the busing plan, minority children are bused out of their communities over a much longer period of time than are whites. According to the April 18, 1979 (Louisville, Kentucky) Courier-Journal, " . . . blacks are bused for eight to ten of their school years, while whites who stay in the school are bused only two years" (Sec. B, p. 1).

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss either the merits of integrated schools, or busing as a means to achieve integration. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court rendered a discussion of the former point moot when it ruled that " . . . in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Clark, Eighteen Years, p. 6). That busing has been employed as the principal means to desegregate the Jefferson County schools is likewise a legal matter involving the Federal District Court and the Jefferson County Board of Education.

The concern of this paper is, rather, with the attitudes of white and minority students who have been brought together in the same classroom through court-mandated busing. One has only to recall the numerous protests since 1975 in Louisville over court-mandated busing to realize that intercultural understanding and tolerance were indeed

low. The study on which this paper is based sought to probe a source of the misunderstanding and intolerance by examining the attitudes of the white and minority students brought together through busing. That racial tension characterized the first years of court mandated busing is obvious; yet, no study has systematically looked at the way white and minority students perceive racial tension. The purpose of this study is to do that.

Methodology

The purpose of the study is to compare attitudes of white and minority middle and high school students in the public school system of Jefferson County, Kentucky. The sample includes over 400 students from six different schools--three middle schools and three high schools.

Attitudinal Survey

The attitudinal data were collected as a part of an ethnic heritage program financed by a federal grant awarded by the Ethnic Heritage Studies Branch of the U.S. Office of Education to the University of Louisville.[1] The attitudinal survey was developed, pretested, revised and administered during the summer and fall of 1976. The survey looked at the way minority students perceive "the way society is" and "the way society ought to be" on 40 attitudinal items. This study compares these perceptions with those of white students in the same schools.

The measure of the variable racial tension and harmony, which consisted of 11 items taken from that attitudinal survey, was developed by combining conceptually similar attitudinal items using factor analysis. Appendix 2 lists the attitudinal items which have been combined to form the Racial Tension/Harmony Scale and the factor loadings which correspond to each item. The principal factoring method of factor analysis was used, with squared multiple correlation coefficients used as commonality estimates. Responses on 40 questionnaire items ("the way society ought to be") for 464 students were analyzed. Five factors were extracted, and the factor matrix rotated using the varimax procedure. The attitudinal items with rotated factor loadings of plus .40 or greater were combined to form the scales.

Sampling Plan

Cluster sampling was used to select the students to be included in the study. The number of schools selected for inclusion in the Ethnic Heritage Project was limited by funding to six, three middle schools and three high schools. These six schools were selected at random. From each of these six schools, four social studies teachers were randomly selected to participate in all facets of the Project, making a total of 24 teachers. The students surveyed for this study came from one class taught by each of these teachers; and this one class was selected at random from the four or five taught. Every student in each class selected was surveyed.[2]

Characteristics of the Sample

Tables 1 through 3 refer to the characteristics of the sample. The following considerations seem applicable. Table 1 summarizes the following information. Three hundred and seventy-eight white students and 81 minority students were surveyed, with three students not providing ethnicity information. Approximately half of the sample were male (48.3%) and half were female (50.9%), with four students not providing information on sex; approximately half were 15 years old or younger and half were 16 years old or older, with 27 students not providing age information.

Insert Table 1

Table 2 provides the following information: of the 378 white students in the sample, 184 (48.4%) were boys and 194 (51.5%) were girls; 186 (48.9%) were 15 years old or younger and 177 (46.6%) were 16 years old or older, with 17 students not providing information on age.

Insert Table 2

Table 3 provides the following information: of the 81 minority students interviewed, 76 were black and five belonged to other ethnically identifiable minorities. Of the total of 81 minority students, 40 were boys (49.4%) and 40 were girls (49.4%), with one student failing to identify gender. Thirty-six of the minority students (44.4%) were 15 years old or younger and 37 (45.7%) were 16 years old or older, with 8 minority students not providing this information.

Insert Table 3

Variables

Independent Variable. That one's perception of the juxtaposition of racial tension and harmony is influenced by his/her ethnicity is the main thesis of this study. Thus one's ethnicity is the independent variable. A determination of students' ethnicity was based on their responses to one of the questionnaire items. On the questionnaire, students were asked to check the appropriate space corresponding to ethnic background: White, Black, Other Minority. Subsequently, the categories of Black and Other Minority were collapsed into the single category Minority.

Dependent Variable. Students' perception of racial tension and harmony, both in the way they actually perceive this juxtaposition and in the way they envision it in an ideal sense, is the dependent variable. Thus, the dependent variable has two parts: students' perception of the way society is and their perception of the way society ought to be on this measure of racial tension and harmony. The questionnaire from which the data were drawn for this study included attitudinal items which attempted to document respondents' perception.

of and attitude toward the way society is (society as actually perceived) and the way society ought to be (society in an ideal sense). For example, student attitudes regarding racial conflict, ideological solidarity and busing were assessed.

Racial tension and harmony perception was measured by combining several attitudinal items each of which measured some aspect of the variable. Factor analysis was used in classifying the attitudinal items.

Control Variables. So as to better distinguish the independent relationship between ethnicity and racial tension and harmony perception, sex and age were controlled. These two variables are dichotomous with the following divisions: sex: boy/girl; age: 15 and under/16 and over.

Data Analysis Procedures

The Racial Tension/Harmony Scale, the measure of the dependent variable, was created by the factor analysis procedure. In operationalizing this procedure, the following values were assigned to the responses of the students toward each attitudinal item: 0) Strongly disagree, 1) Disagree 2) Agree, 3) Strongly agree. The coded responses to the 11 items which constitute the Racial Tension/Harmony Scale were then summed and the mean ascertained for both "the way society is" and "the way society ought to be." The influence of ethnicity on students' perception of tension and harmony was examined by comparing white students' mean scores on this Scale--for both "the way society is" and "the way society ought to be"--with those of minority students. The t-test summarized the relationships involved. Age and sex were controlled to demonstrate the independent effects of ethnicity.

Test Results

A. Racial Tension/Harmony, Perception of the Way Society Is.

Apparently white students perceive more tension in their integrated classrooms than do minority students (Table 4). On a scale of zero to three, with a score of three indicating high racial tension as measured by the Racial Tension/Harmony Scale, the mean score of white students was 1.63 while the mean score of minority students was 1.53, which is a statistically significant difference. Perceived racial tension thus appears to be associated with ethnic background, although the strength of this association is questionable.

As Table 5 indicates, when the sex of the students is controlled for, the absolute differences between the means on the Scale remain virtually the same for boys and girls; yet, these differences are no longer statistically significant. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that when extraneous variables are controlled for there are fewer degrees of freedom and higher standard errors due to smaller samples. Nonetheless, perceived racial tension does appear to be somewhat associated with ethnicity, although this association is no longer statistically significant for either boys or girls when sex is controlled for.

Table 6 demonstrates that when age is controlled for, the difference in perception of racial tension is most acute between the younger (15 years old and under) white and minority students. For the older (16 years old and over) students, there is no apparent association between ethnic background and racial tension perception.

In summary, perception of racial tension appears to be weakly associated with ethnic background. White students perceive somewhat more racial tension than do minority students. When sex is controlled for, the association seems to persist for both boys and girls (although the mean differences are no longer statistically significant). When age is controlled for, it becomes evident that the association between ethnic background and perception of racial tension persists only for the younger students; indeed the association for this group is considerably stronger than is the association for the entire sample.

B. Racial Tension/Harmony, Perception of the Way Society Ought to Be.

Although white students actually perceive somewhat more racial tension in their integrated classrooms than do minority students, it appears that the minority students are willing to accept as the way society ought to be less racial harmony than are the white students (Table 7). On the same scale of zero to three, with a score of three indicating high racial tension as the way society ought to be, the minority students' mean score was 1.52 while the white students' mean score was 1.32. Thus, minority students are more likely to settle for a lesser degree of racial harmony than are their white classmates.

This relationship between ethnic background and racial tension as the way society ought to be persists for girls (Table 8). While minority boys do appear more willing than white boys to accept less racial harmony as desirable ($\bar{X}$ = 1.54 and $\bar{X}$ = 1.43 respectively), the difference is small and statistically insignificant. Minority girls, on the other hand, appear far more likely than white girls to accept as desirable a lower level of racial harmony.

When age is controlled for, the association between less racial harmony as the way society ought to be and ethnic background clearly persists for the older students. For the younger students, however,

the association still exists (minority students higher on the Racial Tension/Harmony Scale than white students) but is no longer statistically significant.

In summary, minority students are more likely to score higher than white students on the Racial Tension/Harmony Scale for the "Way Society Ought to Be," and more likely to score lower on this Scale for the "Way Society Is." Thus, it appears that minority students are more willing to accept some racial tension as desirable than are white students; yet, white students actually perceive more racial tension than their minority classmates in their own integrated classrooms. When age and sex are controlled for, the association between less racial harmony as desirable and ethnic background persists to a statistically significant degree for girls and older students. For boys and younger students, the association exists but is no longer statistically significant.

Analysis

Few people would claim that identification with an ethnic group is somehow bad or wrong. In fact, the point of view expressed by Edith W. King (1977) -- that identification with an ethnic group is a central force for socialization and consequently is necessary to a society's existence -- is widely shared. Furthermore, few have taken issue with Thomas F. Pettigrew, who, in his rebuttal of Armor's controversial Public Interest article (1972), argued that ". . . black consciousness and solidarity are not negative characteristics . . .[but rather]. . . should be regarded as a further success of busing" (Pierced Armor, p. 5). What is lacking, however, is an understanding of the various reasons for ethnic group identification, and of the consequences of ethnic group identification on intercultural understanding. Because educators have had little success in determining the reasons for ethnic group identification, it is not surprising that intercultural understanding and tolerance among school children remain at a low level despite well intentioned efforts by teachers to engender intercultural awareness. James A. Banks, in an analysis of the causes of prejudice, supports that conclusion in his statement, "We cannot reduce racial prejudice unless we acquire an understanding of its causes" (p. 16).

The study upon which this article is based was a single, cross-sectional attitudinal survey. The kinds of inferences which may be drawn from the results of the study are therefore limited. The study has shown that while white students perceive more racial tension in their integrated classrooms than do minority students, minority students are more willing to accept as the way society ought to be less racial harmony than are white students. The study does not indicate whether these differing perceptions of, and the

differing values attached to, racial harmony are contributing to increased racial identification or are explained by racial identification.

Racial tension in the classroom, nonetheless, may be an impediment to learning; it may be an obstacle in the process of education. Yet, ethnic identity appears to be related to racial tension. Minority students and white students do not perceive racial tension in the same way, nor do they attach the same value to racial harmony. It may be that much of the research on the effects of induced integration -- busing -- have been misdirected in emphasizing such variables as achievement, aspirations, self-concept, attrition and educational opportunities. The results of efforts which have focused on those variables are at such odds with each other that I am prompted to ask whether the focus should not have been instead understanding more fully racial and ethnic differences and the reasons for children's tendency to identify with their own racial and ethnic groups (Armor, 1972; Dobson, 1977; Felice, 1974; Felice & Richardson, 1975; Marcus & Sheehan, 1978; Pettigrew, 1972; Samuels, 1972; Whiting, 1974). To assume that teachers understand the sources of ethnic identification is to assume too much. Yet, such an understanding seems essential to being able to teach in such a way as to engender inter-cultural awareness and racial tolerance. Moreover, such an understanding would seem necessary to be able to reach students and to fully communicate with them, certainly a requisite for successful teaching.

Conclusions

The results of this study of the attitudes of white and minority students have suggested the following conclusions:

A. White and minority students have different perceptions of and different values attached to racial harmony.

B. Studies on busing and integration have focused on measures of outcome and not on understanding racial and ethnic differences, which understanding is a necessary condition for determining the sources of ethnic identification.

C. Yet, understanding the sources of ethnic identification is a necessary condition for effective teaching, that is the kind of teaching which results in intercultural awareness, racial tolerance and maximum learning.

D. In light of these conclusions, I offer the following suggestions:

1. That more research be conducted into the attitudinal dispositions of white and minority students in integrated schools, and

2. that the curriculum of urban oriented teacher training programs be restructured to emphasize the special challenges of teaching racially, culturally, ethnically and economically diverse students, so that teachers will no longer be left on their own to design educational programs for their ethnically diverse classrooms.

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Footnotes

[1]Berman, E. H. and Egginton, E. Louisville area ethnic heritage studies teachers training and curriculum development project (Application for federal assistance). Washington, D. C.: U.S. Office of Education, Ethnic Heritage Studies Branch, 1976.

[2]Two caveats are in order. First it was necessary to rely on the individual teachers to administer the questionnaire. While an attempt was made to provide each teacher with explicit instructions, it is unwarranted to assume that the quality of instruction provided by all teachers to their students was consistent. Second, students' understanding of the two phrases "the way society is" and "the way society ought to be" with respect to the array of attitudinal items included on the questionnaire (See Appendix 1) might well have differed. It is hoped that any bias introduced into the study by inadequate or inconsistent instructions and differing student interpretations of the measuring instrument are minimal. While the above disclaimers jeopardize somewhat the generalizability of this study, the results ought to constitute a point of departure for additional studies in the same area.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Sample

Entire Sample

	Frequency	Relative Frequency %
Race		
White	380	81.9
Black	76	16.4
Other	5	1.1
Missing Information	3	0.6
Sex		
Boys	224	48.3
Girls	236	50.9
Missing Information	4	0.9
Age		
15 years or younger	222	47.8
16 years or older	215	46.4
Missing Information	27	5.8

Table 2

Characteristics of the Sample

Whites

Sex

	Frequency	Relative Frequency %
Boys	184	48.4
Girls	194	51.5
Missing Information	2	0.5
	380	
Age		
15 years or younger	186	48.9
16 years or older	177	46.6
Missing Information	17	4.5

Table 3

Characteristics of the Sample

Blacks and Other

Ethnic Groups

	Frequency	Relative Frequency %
Race		
Blacks	76	93.8
Others	5	6.2
	81	
Sex		
Boys	40	49.4
Girls	40	49.4
Missing Information	1	1.2
Age		
15 years or younger	36	44.4
16 years or older	37	45.7
Missing Information	8	9.9

Table 4

Racial Tension/Harmony Scale #1

Perception of the

Way Society Is

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Pooled Variance Est. t
White	380	1.6311	.389	+2.02
Minority	81	1.5320	.413	

d.f. = 459

$p < .05$

F value = 1.08 (N.S.) ∴ Variances are not unequal and thus the pooled variance estimate is used.

Table 5

Racial Tension/Harmony Scale #1A

Perception of The

Way Society Is

Boys

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t
White	184	1.6309	.439	1.37
Minority	40	1.5250	.463	

d.f. = 222

p (N.S.)

F value - 1.11 (N.S.) .˙. Variances are not unequal and thus the pooled variance estimate is used.

Girls

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t
White	194	1.6223	.336	1.45
Minority	40	1.5364	.369	

d.f. = 232

p (N.S.)

F value = 1.20 (N.S.) .˙. Variances are not unequal and thus the pooled variance estimate is used.

Table 6

Racial Tension/Harmony Scale #1B

Perception of The

Way Society Is

15 Years Old and Younger

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t
White	186	1.6500	.436	2.75
Minority	36	1.4343	.400	

d.f. = 220

$p < .01$

F value = 1.19 (N.S.) ∴ Variances are not unequal and thus the pooled variance estimate is used.

16 Years and Older

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t
White	159	1.5952	.330	-27
Minority	32	1.6165	.428	

d.f. = 38.75 (Separate variance estimate)

p (N.S.)

F value = 1.68, $p < .05$ ∴ Variances are unequal and thus the separate variance estimate is used.

Table 7

Racial Tension/Harmony Scale #2

Perception of The

Way Society Ought to Be

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t
White	380	1.3222	.506	-3.22
Minority	81	1.5196	.477	

d.f. = 459

$p < .01$

F value = 1.12 (N.S.) $\therefore$ Variances are not unequal and thus the pooled variance estimate is used.

Table 8

Racial Tension/Harmony Scale #2A

Perception of The

Way Society Ought to Be

Boys

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t
White	184	1.4348	.551	-1.16
Minority	40	1.5432	.468	

d.f. = 222

p (N.S.)

F value = 1.39 (N.S.).'. Variances are not unequal and thus the pooled variance estimate is used.

Girls

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t
White	194	1.2104	.431	-3.60
Minority	40	1.4864	.493	

d.f. = 232

$p < .01$

F value = 1.31 (N.S.) .'. Variances are not unequal and thus the pooled variance estimate is used.

Table 9

Racial Tension/Harmony Scale #2B

Perception of The

Way Society Ought to Be

15 Years Old and Younger

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t
White	186	1.3925	.577	-1.28
Minority	36	1.5227	.452	

d.f. = 220

p (N.S.)

F value = 1.62 (N.S.) .˙. Variances are not unequal and thus the pooled variance estimate is used.

16 Years Old and Older

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t
White	159	1.2030	.397	-2.35
Minority	32	1.4290	.515	

d.f. = 38.75 (Separate variance estimate)

$p < .05$

F value = 1.68, $p < .05$.˙. Variances are unequal and thus the separate variance estimate is used.

Appendix 1

Factor Analysis Loadings for the

Racial Tension/Harmony Scale

Racial Tension/Harmony Scale

The Racial Tension/Harmony Scale is composed of the attitudinal items listed below. Students were asked whether they 1) Strongly disagreed, 2) Disagreed, 3) Agreed, 4) Strongly agreed with the item in terms of the degree to which the item reflected "the way society ought to be."

.47084 1. Most people will change their opinion as a result of criticism, even if they really don't change the way they feel.

.50828 2. The notion of the melting pot ignores that one-half of our society has never "melted in," but has rather stuck to the bottom of the pot.

.53972 3. Ethnic groups that insist on following their own particular customs should be made to live in separate communities.

.53213 4. Members of ethnic groups have been discriminated against and have discriminated against others.

.55430 5. A major source of conflict in the United States is between white and non-white.

.41987 6. People in authority give special privileges to groups they favor.

.46541 7. At my school a black student often has to make a choice between preserving his black identity and conforming to white expectations.

.49890 8. In my school there is a tendency to put down those students who act or dress differently from the majority of students.

.48980 9. Students with odd ideas ought to be kept from expressing these ideas to others.

.41644 10. I think it's okay for Blacks to learn about Black history and Indians to learn about Indian heritage, but these studies are not very meaningful for white people.

.43609 11. Tensions in our schools resulting from busing will be eased as time goes on. (reversed).